PERSPECTIVES

Forging a Bipartisan Consensus for American Leadership

By

Thomas R. Pickering
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

[The following is a reprint of the remarks given by Thomas R. Pickering at the George Bush Presidential Center at Texas A and M University, October 23, 1999.]

The question being asked around the country is what role the U.S. should play in the world. It is almost always a timely question, but today, it is even more salient. The end of the Cold War marked the end of one broad, consensual understanding of the U.S. role. Even more important, the last ten years have marked an exponential growth in real U.S. interests overseas. Fueled by the technological and information revolutions, economies and cultures have indeed become globalized. Those two factors, exponential growth in U.S. interests and the search for new philosophical underpinnings for U.S. international action, do indeed put forward the question, "What is the U.S. role?"

The answer must be bipartisan. We cannot serve our country well if two rival views develop, with proponents on either side viewing the overriding goal as a zero sum game or, even worse, a device solely for undercutting each other. Americans will, and should, disagree on particular actions; that is a strength of democracy. However, we need to forge a bipartisan consensus for American leadership and a bipartisan answer that puts America first.

That answer will come from politics, but not from politics alone. It will come also from business and from our citizens' concerns. The answer to "What is the U.S. role in the world?" must include advancing U.S. trade and investment.

The answer to "What is the U.S. role in the world?" must reflect the concerns of the American people, from their economic well-being, to their concern over terrorism, to the globalization of compassion that accompanies a world instantly connected by CNN and the Internet. As our population becomes increasingly diverse, our citizens also expect their government to pay attention to events in their countries of origin.

As we build a new consensus, we must begin with the presumption that the United States has an important international role. Too many Americans on both sides of the political spectrum forget our frontier spirit. Rather than viewing a changed world and seeing opportunity, they see a changing world and prefer to stay out of it. Isolationism can be cloaked in any number of appealing slogans, but the fact remains: isolationism is one of the most significant threats to the security and prosperity of the United States.

There are myriad reasons for a rise of isolationism, including many that are more appropriate for a conference of psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Change is both hard on the human psyche and a challenge to well-loved cultural traditions. We can recall Franklin Roosevelt's words at his first inaugural when he urged Americans to grapple with the challenges before them, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself–nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat to advance." He was trying to galvanize Americans to overcome the devastation of the depression. How ironic that today, when we are triumphant politically and economically, we find ourselves needing to inspire courage among serious segments of our society, to urge them not to convert advance into retreat.

To walk away from the world is to walk away from both our future and our heritage. George Bush did not walk away. Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Harry Truman did not walk away. They walked forward, in the same way that America's pioneers walked forward: from England to Jamestown and Plymouth, from the lower 48 to Alaska, from the east and from all corners of the globe to Texas. Today, Republicans and Democrats, business leaders, workers, parents, and students must walk forward together. We must keep our eye on the breadth of our interests abroad and face up to fear.

Too many Americans hear the question "What is the U.S. role in the world?" and postulate an erroneous equation: that American involvement in the world equals military engagement, and military engagement in the post-Cold War era is for them muddy, murky, dangerous, and costly. To equate the U.S. role in the world solely to military intervention is not only grossly inaccurate and harmful to the American people, but also exacerbates the fears that fire isolationism and the acrimony that works against developing a bipartisan consensus on U.S. foreign policy for the next century.

Tonight, we indeed are focusing on recent military interventions. Rather than look solely at the conflicts, I want to consider the hopes and expectations of the American people and the effects of the Cold War's closure and globalization on the actions we took. In recreating the past, I also am reminded of the words of Lord Acton, the British historian and statesman. In 1887, when asked to give advice to persons about to write history, his wisdom was succinct: "Don't." With those cautionary words haunting me, let me give history writing a try.

In that miraculous late autumn ten years ago, Germans tore down the wall that divided Berlin, and an old concept we had gotten used to crumbled there as well. Nearly one year later, in August of 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Deciding to construct the Desert Storm coalition, sticking with that decision, and building the coalition were monumental tasks, even though in retrospect, they often are painted as effortless. Several factors were at work that helped make the coalition possible.

First, Saddam's attack on Kuwait was a clear violation of international law and posed a threat to Saudi Arabia and the region. Moreover, Saddam had picked on a small, peaceful state with no history of aggression. That is the kind of brutal attack that the international community could not ignore. That this happened in the Middle East is even more significant. The political importance of the region and its strategic position meant that much of the world would be directly affected by any conflict there, and by attempts to change borders with force. Economically, the world's dependence on oil from the region was hugely and directly important.

But those three factors, oil, war in a strategic region, and aggression, only guaranteed international attention. They did not guarantee unity of action, and easily could have been the ingredients of discord leading to wider conflict.One readily can imagine scenarios in which some countries might have seen their interest in siding with Iraq, staying neutral or cutting a deal with him. Those tendencies were present throughout.

And there were other challenges, as well: build a coalition that included Arab states still technically at war with Israel; protect Israel; keep Israel from responding militarily to Iraqi Scud missile attacks, which would have torn apart the coalition; and help manage Israeli-Palestinian issues so that unexpected events, such as the lone Israeli gunman killing Palestinians in an unexpected attack at the Dome of the Rock and Palestinian terrorist activities, did not undermine the coalition with the Arab states.

We worked with the Soviet Union even as it struggled simultaneously to come to terms with German unification and with the impending break-up of its own union. The end of the Cold War did not ensure unity; it merely made cooperation one possibility among many others. Surely, its ending decreased tensions, but decreasing the "negative" did not mean that it would be possible to build a "positive"–that countries once divided by the Cold War would each find their national interest in cooperation or, to say the least, that they would cooperate in the Security Council.

What then, was the decisive factor in building the coalition that turned back Saddam? I submit to you that the key to Desert Storm was leadership. President Bush masterfully guided the country, building consensus within the United States and in the international community. Secretary Baker and the rest of the cabinet responded expertly, serving their president and their country extremely well, and ensuring the success of the mission. Without President Bush's persuasiveness, clear strategic view, and determination, the coalition very likely would not have come together.

The United States kept the U.N. Security Council united in some twelve resolutions from August to December 1990. The fact that the Council continued to be ignored and opposed by Iraq made the rallying of the body easier. Saddam was the perfect enemy in that regard. The Security Council began to look and act more like a coordinated body. The importance of the issue and world attention meant that the Council and its members had suddenly become important and stood for something. Previously, the Council had been a sleepy body, riven with Cold War inertia and divisions. A unified Council was very much in the interests of the United States. The Council could pass mandatory sanctions resolutions, and it could authorize the use of force. Moreover, resolutions were passed with large majorities. Even Cuba, then on the Council, ended up supporting nearly half of the resolutions.

The most difficult resolution was the use of force decision by the Council. The rallying work of President Bush and Secretary Baker was essential. States do not lightly instruct their ambassadors in New York to authorize the use of force, as we have come to find out. In fact, the Council met at ministerial level that day, and later in its proceedings, with heads of state present. In the heady days following victory, much of the world was optimistic that this war marked the beginning of greater international cooperation.

Dean Acheson wrote of being "present at the creation" to describe the role U.S. statesmen played after World War II in constructing the international system. Although we were not aware of it at the time, August 1990 and the events that followed denoted a kind of second creation, what

many had hoped would be a “New World Order,” marked by responsible international leadership and cooperation, and an invigorated United Nations.

None of you need me to tell you what happened next: the horrible and tragic killing of our Army Rangers in Somalia provoked a resurgence of a debate that began before the Gulf War and follows us now. When is it appropriate to use military force, and, more to the point, can you justify using our military in regions in which Americans either do not see their interests at stake or are willing to help only so long as the costs remain very low?

Somalia, as well as the concurrent mayhem in Bosnia and genocidal slaughter in Rwanda, drove home the reality that the Gulf experience could not serve as a model for other situations where the diplomatic lineup was more confused, the stakes less clear, and the difference between good guys and bad guys less simple to discern. It was also an early indication of the coming debate on the international community's role in internal strife.

Kosovo set a different standard for multilateral action. In that case, the Council was not able to agree on the use of force, even though it had set the groundwork for international action and later approved peace keeping. From the Kosovo experience emerge several lessons, as well as new questions:

- Once again, the central role of the presidency was underscored as President Clinton built support for Kosovo in the United States and abroad;

- NATO works and we and our Allies can act together;

- To strengthen that partnership, European allies need to strengthen their defense and decrease the gap between their capabilities and ours;

- Air warfare, in some situations at least, can achieve significant political gains;

- No loss of air crew in combat sets a new standard for war fighting, which has led to controversy over whether it is an unalloyed good, or whether it sets a standard for engagement too high adequately to serve our national interests in the future;

- Political management of the Alliance and the United Nations, before, during, and in the period following the use of force is imperative;

- Military intervention needs to be followed up with an intensive effort to consolidate the gains and work out the political solutions and actions required to achieve the overall goals of freedom, democracy, and stability;

- Effective war fighting needs to be followed by effective war termination and peace consolidation;

- Bringing Russia along required a huge diplomatic effort, but in the end kept the U.N. and the Allies together and the Russians on our side of the solution.

Kosovo also set off a new debate around the questions of the Security Council’s role and the responsibility of the international community in the face of humanitarian crises. While the United

Nations Security Council support for the use of force is always desirable, some have come to view it as necessary. Others see a growing body of world opinion ready to use military intervention in a collective framework such as NATO as necessary also to deal with internal crises such as the horrific consequences of pogroms, ethnic killing, and persecution.

The U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan was eloquent in describing this ongoing debate over humanitarian intervention. He said,

> To those for whom the greatest threat to the future of international order is the use of force in the absence of a Security Council mandate, one might ask...in the context of Rwanda, if in those dark days and hours leading up to the genocide, a coalition of states had been prepared to act in defense of the Tutsi population, but did not receive prompt Council authorization, should such a coalition have stood aside as the horror unfolded? To those for whom the Kosovo action heralded a new era when states and groups of states can take military action outside the established mechanisms of international law, one might ask: 'Is there not a danger of such interventions undermining the imperfect, yet resilient security system created after the Second World War?'

The Secretary General's questions summarize the state of one debate in the aftermath of Kosovo. On this issue, the U.S. remains committed to two vital criteria that go back to the beginnings of our republic: force must be a last resort and the United States will only use force when it believes its interests are at stake. In those rare cases when we do need to act militarily, working with allies and friends is the most effective and least costly strategy.

Turning now to East Timor, we see yet another example of how the international community can work. In that case, the Council rallied to the cause. Consensus was possible in part because Indonesia's consent was achieved both for the deployment of the force and earlier, for the U.N. to hold the consultation in which the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence. We also see an important example of regional countries leading the effort, with the U.S. in a supporting role. Australia is leading the multi-national INTERFET force that is restoring order after the militia's murderous rampage. In a very important development, Thailand will serve as deputy. Other Asian countries will take part in the upcoming peace keeping operation. This regional leadership sets an example for the future.

What do our actions in the Gulf War and Somalia, Kosovo and Timor, and the American people's reactions suggest for the future? The first point to underscore is the national interest. Our historic faith in the judgment of the American people is well placed. Clearly, our national interests were at stake in the Gulf War to a far greater degree than in Somalia. We can safely assume that when the national stake is both unequivocal and high, we will have an easier time building domestic consensus for whatever actions are necessary. Equally evident is that humanitarian concerns matter to the American people, as the information revolution increasingly attunes them to tragedies overseas. Having foreign policy play out in your living room, every night, in video and audio, has its own impact, as we have found since Vietnam. Public distress in the face of Somalia's agony led to an international response that saved about one million people from famine. Americans want their government to help people who are suffering and we must do so. However, humanitarian concerns tend not to be sufficient in themselves to guarantee consensus for military engagement.

There is a growth in our range of interests, some hard and existential and preeminent; some softer, less exigent, but still widely supported. We had a nationwide consensus and what might be called "instant recognition" of the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War and to a lesser, but significant extent, of the threat during the Gulf War. Consequently, in both cases, citizens and Congress were prepared to take on higher risks and to pay the price to defend the United States from these threats. Indeed, the nature of the challenges, and our success in meeting them, helped keep the public focused on foreign affairs. But let us not forget that even in these cases, it took tremendous leadership to get the U.S. involved. The Senate passed the resolution authorizing the use of force in the Gulf by a mere three votes. The corollary is problematic. As we adjust to the expansion of national interests in the globalized world, the instant recognition factor may be absent even when vital interests are at stake. This condition puts a premium on political leadership, as both Presidents Bush and Clinton demonstrated.

In addition to considering U.S. national interest, a second factor critical to international cooperation is the perceived national interests of other countries. In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, hope got the best of reality. Observers and many of our citizens hoped countries would see events, interests and their roles in the world in compatible-even cooperative terms. And of course, they do not always do so. This leaves us with what might be considered a new, and in some ways a more old-fashioned world in which nations pursue their interests in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of means and partners.

Neither the Cold War with its relatively clear cut sides, nor the Gulf, where we pulled an international coalition together under U.N. auspices, provide us with a cookie cutter way of pursuing U.S. interests. That means that while our strategic objectives remain constant, the tactics of our diplomacy must be different in different situations. Perhaps that sounds obvious, but in fact, it is one of the least understood post-Cold War truths, particularly among those inclined to call our foreign policy "incoherent" or "inconsistent."

The aftermath of the Gulf War corresponded with a parallel hope that democracy and free markets would spring up easily all around the world, forming yet another basis for comity. Part of that hope has proven true, even miraculously so when one considers Central and Eastern Europe, South Korea, Taiwan, and most of South America. In Africa alone, the number of democracies has grown exponentially, with Nigeria the most recent addition. That is good news, even if reform has not proven easy or quick in other countries.

Another hope in the aftermath of the Gulf War was that the United Nations would be tremendously more effective. International organizations can only be at their most effective when member states agree with each other and want the organization to function. When Russia and China disagree with us, the U.N. is stuck. Russia has seen some traditional interests, such as Serbia, loom large on the domestic scene and become the cause for decisions against moving in the Security Council, especially without Serbian approval. China has a doctrinal view against U.N. intervention, no matter how serious the need, unless there is host state approval in advance. As Gulf War euphoria faded into Somalia, into the realpolitik of competing national interests, and the reality of democratic transitions that range from the "miraculous" to the "barely there" a not unhealthy measure of disillusionment has set in. Talk of a New World Order dissipated rapidly–except in those cases in which the expression was turned on its head and called the "new world disorder."

Here, we see the birth of the false equation I mentioned earlier. In the view of many Americans, international engagement equals military intervention. But a review of recent history reveals lessons that are profound and that get to the heart of how the United States can best pursue its interests in the world.

To sum it up in a different equation, strength plus preparedness plus friendship equals American prosperity and security. None of these is created in a nano-second; each requires the disciplined work of soldiers, diplomats and statesmen, supported by a bipartisan American consensus and adequate resources.

Let me begin with strength. The strength of the United States is a composite of economic, political, and military force. Those are the three forces with which we defend our interests and influence world events. They were essential in the Gulf and Kosovo. We have built that strength over decades–it is the legacy that each generation of American pioneers, entrepreneurs and statesmen passes on to the next. But national strength, like an athlete's power, is only useful if we are prepared. U.S. force cannot be pulled from thin air. You cannot snap your fingers and pull together an international coalition any more than you can wage war without years of training or start up a new business simply by wishing it.

Similarly, even less easy is the diplomatic job of heading off the numerous conflicts that could become wars if not carefully dealt with beforehand. In the Gulf, Kosovo and now East Timor, we were effective because we drew on long years of diplomacy. Preparedness, both diplomatic and military, comes from years of engagement and from adequate resources. Today, the United States risks squandering its predominant position in the world and the incumbent ability to shape events, markets and politics, because it is not adequately funding its diplomacy and the defense necessary to back it up and ensure its success. This is a national shame and a victory for shortsighted isolationists. Let them explain to our children why they took victory in the Cold War, Gulf and Kosovo and turned it into defeat, why they squandered our children's future.

We won in the Gulf and in Kosovo because we were prepared. We must prepare ourselves for the challenges of the next century, a century that clearly will be even more “international” than these hundred years have been. Reducing our spending on foreign policy needs, including diplomacy, by 40 percent since 1985 is not the answer; neither are 15-20 percent cuts in the current budget. If we do not restore our diplomatic strength, we will gut our capacity to make the world conducive to business and safe for Americans. We will strangle our ability to shape events to the point where we may not be able to build the next “Gulf” coalition when our country needs it most. We will squander the heritage that so many of our parents fought and died for in World Wars I and II, and we will put more young American soldiers at risk because we failed to pay an ounce of prevention.

The next president of the United States, of whichever party, deserves to have in hand a vibrant diplomacy, fighting for the American people.

Finally, let’s consider alliances, cooperation and friendship. By this, I mean the importance of developing excellent relations with other countries, both to advance our interests day-to-day and to form the base on which we can rely in crisis situations. While part of preparedness, it is also so important as to stand on its own as a determinant of our future. From the Gulf War to Kosovo, the value of NATO became extraordinarily clear. No alliance has ever enjoyed the

military interoperability of the Atlantic Alliance. We train together, plan together, talk together. Nowhere else in the world can up to 60,000 troops be brought together for an important task, as was the case in Kosovo, ready to work, operate and fight as one force. And no single country outside our own can manage that feat, and it can be done better and at less cost, through NATO.

But the international coalition against Saddam and now in East Timor is composed of more than NATO allies. The alliance that won the Gulf War included countries from every continent. International cooperation galvanizes support for our positions and means we can carry out our objectives more successfully and at significantly less cost to America, in blood and treasure.

Strength, preparedness and international cooperation are lessons from the Gulf and Kosovo that we must carry forward as we face new challenges and opportunities. These are traditional lessons and not particularly mind-bending-except when you consider how easily they are forgotten.

It is also important to state what the Gulf, Kosovo and East Timor do not mean. They do not mean the U.S. will intervene militarily everywhere. Force is and must remain the last resort. They also do not mean the U.S. will intervene only in Europe, a frequent criticism leveled at our foreign policy by those who consider us too Euro-centric.

Note that those three conflicts–the Gulf, Kosovo, and East Timor–are in three different continents. Note that we are working very hard to help Africans end conflicts there and to help Colombia come to grips with its economic, narcotics and insurgency problems.

Most importantly, conflict in the Gulf, Kosovo and East Timor are not the sum total of U.S. foreign policy. International engagement does not always equal military intervention. In fact, it rarely does so. The U.S. is engaged around the world for the very simple reason that our political, economic and security interests span the globe. The real debate, therefore, should not be over military intervention alone, but about how the U.S. can advance its interests around the world.

Tom Brokaw writes of America's greatest generation. Those men and women, and those who succeeded them, led the nation at the moment when America came to terms with its role on the international stage. They realized that change had brought new opportunities and that seizing opportunity required assuming responsibility and acting internationally. They, and many of you here today, created a more stable international environment.

But will we capitalize on that achievement?

Today's leaders must chose whether to lead or whether to pretend that U.S. prosperity does not depend on international engagement

- to pretend that 30% of American jobs are not dependent on foreign trade and investment

- to pretend that the safety of American citizens is not at risk from foreign terrorists and pariah states seeking weapons of mass destruction

- to pretend we can find refuge at home and that the rest of the globe does not count nor have any effect the United States.

We can lead or we will be led by others. “Stop the world, I want to get off” won't work for us or our kids. Let’s take the inheritance of the “greatest generation.” Let’s look to the brave people around the world who claimed their freedom following our example. Let us remember that we are Americans and see in this globalized world new opportunities.

America must lead, we ought to lead, we are here to lead. We have the capability, the resources and the national interests at stake to demand that we do so.

Let us join in forging a bipartisan consensus for American leadership.